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SUBJECT: POLITICAL REALIGNMENT CONTINUES AS JULY 22
CONFIDENCE VOTE ON NUCLEAR INITIATIVE APPROACHES

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government continued to maintain its slim majority leading toward the July 22 confidence vote. Several small, marginal parties remained uncommitted, hoping to use their leverage to extract concessions for their support. The Congress Party launched a media campaign and appointed 11 spokespersons to defend the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative from resurgent criticism, but remained reticent to clarify ambiguities in the draft IAEA Safeguards Agreement of concern to key Board members. Left Front leaders teamed up with Mayawati to thrash the nuclear initiative, while opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) former National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra promoted the deal in a televised interview. END SUMMARY.

Approaching July 22 Confidence Vote, Small Parties Make Hay
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¶2. (SBU) Political bargaining ahead of the July 22 confidence vote continued over the July 12-13 weekend, resulting in no clear change in the expected result. Educated guesses place the anticipated vote count at about 274 in favor of the UPA and its nuclear deal, 242 opposed, and 27 undecided. Many small parties remain uncommitted, and their price for support is rising. In exchange for their support, the three members of parliament of the Telangana Rashtra Party demanded the creation of a new state of Telangana to be carved out of Andhra Pradesh. Telangana statehood is a nonstarter according to Consulate Chennai, leaving the three TRS members unlikely to support the government. Shiromai Akali Dal (SAD) leader Prakash Badal repeated publicly on July 13 that his party's eight MPs would vote against the UPA government. However, Embassy contacts believe Badal's son, a Lok Sabha member, could rally his SAD colleagues to abstain.

Congress Launches PR Campaign At Home, But Not Abroad
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¶3. (SBU) Congress Party leader Sonia Gandhi has appointed 11 spokespersons from among the ranks of senior party leaders to defend the nuclear initiative. The UPA government has taken out full-page advertisements in the major newspapers and dispatched Rahul Gandhi and others to promote the initiative.

¶4. (SBU) Concerned about a feedback effect on its domestic public relations campaign, the government is reticent to make similar efforts to woo international support. Ministry of External Affairs Joint Secretary for the Americas Gaitri Kumar told PolCouns on July 12 that the Indian government plans to answer questions about the IAEA Safeguards Agreement -- particularly the "corrective measures" language -- on July

18 via a high-level briefing to IAEA Ambassadors in Vienna, but not before. The government is concerned about giving the nuclear initiative's opponents ammunition in advance of the July 22 confidence vote, as a vibrant debate about "perpetuity of safeguards only with perpetuity of fuel supply" and each of the India-specific issues in the Safeguards Agreement dominates local media. Kumar said the Indian government prefers to leave the preambular language ambiguous for domestic political reasons rather than issue clarifications through press backgrounders.

Strange Bedfellows: Marxists, Mayawati, Mukherjee

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15. (SUB) Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Mayawati and Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) leader Prakash Karat reaffirmed their opposition to the nuclear initiative and the UPA government following a meeting on July 13. After the meeting, Karat told media, "Mayawati reiterated her opposition to the deal. It was decided that there should be cooperation to stop the deal and in the struggle against the UPA government in this regard." Karat and Mayawati also criticized the government for what they claimed were politically motivated criminal investigations of political rivals. (Karat and the supremely opportunist Mayawati share little more than a common adversary in the UPA government, but a more durable alliance between the two parties would stretch political cynicism to its limits.)

16. (SBU) Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee traveled to Kolkata to pay his respects to Communist Party patriarch

NEW DELHI 00001945 002 OF 002

Joyti Basu on July 13. Speaking to media afterward, Mukherjee praised Basu for his "remarkable, pioneering contribution to national politics." Mukherjee's visit to Basu was orchestrated along with that of Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee, whose own CPM has been pressing him to relinquish his post. Chatterjee, a six-time minister, was unanimously elected Speaker by the Lok Sabha when the UPA coalition received outside support from the Left. Basu reportedly advised him to toe the party line rather than remain as Speaker. (Mukherjee, who owes his cabinet post to support from the Left, likely paid the visit both on behalf of Chatterjee and to signal the Congress Party's willingness to look beyond the nuclear initiative rancor when considering the Left as a possible coalition partner once again following national elections.)

While Left Hectors, BJP Reveals Achilles Heel

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17. (SBU) Virtually drowned out by the bellicose Left, the leaders of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have hardly mentioned the confidence vote. BJP leader L.K. Advani's most recent statement on July 12 objected to allowing jailed Lok Sabha members to cast their vote. Under current practice, the five representatives serving simultaneous parliamentary and prison terms would be brought to the floor for the vote. At least three and possibly all five are thought to support the nuclear initiative.

18. (SBU) The most prominent BJP voice in the media has been that of former National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra, a supporter of the nuclear initiative. Mishra's recent interview in which he explains his support for the initiative while criticizing the government for its handling of the issue has aired repeatedly on local television. (The BJP leadership may be encountering a lack of enthusiasm among members asked to vote alongside their ideological foes against an initiative they began and which most continue to support.)

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